

“Pardon the Interruption” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Ascension Day May 9, 2024

- I. **Acts 1:1-11** – previously read
- II. **Many times, our to-do list is not part of God’s to-do list.**
 - a. We have so many plans and designs for our lives, but they can be changed in a moment’s notice...
 - b. When we go on mission trips, they normally start out with “the speech”.
 - i. I explain to the participants that only part of our plans will be carried out, and that we will experience last minute changes, emergencies, and disruptions that require patience and flexibility.
 1. In a sense, we have a plan, but God is in charge.
 - c. Just last Saturday I officiated an outdoor wedding that was planned many months ago... and happened to be one of the rainiest days this spring.
 - i. As we set up inside rather than on the lawn, I mentioned to one of the guests that we planned an outdoor wedding, and God just laughed and laughed...
 - ii. In my message to the couple, I said that they have plans for a fairytale marriage and life together... and yet we also know that their story may include many struggles and hardships that they could never imagine.
 - d. When we prepare for our day ahead, or we consider plans of any type, do we stop and add the simple prayer, “Thy will be done”?
 - i. We often forget that, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand,” (Proverbs 19:21); and again, “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9)
 - ii. God also tells us in Isaiah 46:10 that He is able to see the future, and that everything He plans will come to pass... and of course Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”
 - e. I read a quote from the German Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis in World War II: “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans ... sending [to] us people with claims and petitions. ... It is a strange fact that Christians and even ministers frequently consider their work so important and urgent that they will allow nothing to disturb them. They think they are doing God a service in this, but actually they are disdaining God’s ‘crooked yet straight path.’”¹
- III. **When will we recognize God’s crooked yet straight path?**

- a. Of course there are major interruptions in life that change everything, but the vast majority are the minor ones that we find annoying and upsetting.
- b. In our pride and selfishness, the interruptions, the trials, the sudden changes we experience in life become more about us than God.
- c. What is your reaction to a sudden change in something you've planned?
 - i. Anger, frustration... trying to force the situation back to the plan?
 - ii. When someone is driving 10 miles per hour under the speed limit, are you grouching that you will be late for your appointment and using choice words to describe the driver in front of you?
 - iii. When a quick trip to get some milk turns into a line that doesn't move because of a customer arguing over a 50-cent coupon in front of you... is your focus on the holdup or the few extra minutes God has given you to talk to others in the line?
 - iv. When you travel and miss an important occasion because of a canceled flight, do you consider the ways God might use you... or even prevented you from experiencing something worse?
- d. I don't want to minimize the greater trials we face – and simply call them an “interruption”.
 - i. It's unfair to flippantly say that a terminal disease, a sudden loss of a loved one, or some other major life altering experience is a simple interruption...
 - ii. Yet, even the most difficult trial or challenge we face is always with God's presence, care, and support – whether through His Word, or through the people He calls followers.
 - 1. God is still the focus – and we will all see the work of God in the big picture when we come face-to-face in glory.

IV. **The disciples' plans for Jesus and His work were interrupted.**

- a. In a dramatic show of God's power, Jesus departed from them... no matter how much they wanted Him to stay and be the in-person presence they had come to depend on.
- b. It's interesting that Jesus didn't just disappear, which might have made the disciples' wonder where Jesus went... but He ascended upward until they could not see Him anymore – Jesus had ascended into heaven.
- c. Our God had a rescue plan that was a very “crooked path” compared to the disciples' plans and understanding.
 - i. From the night Jesus was betrayed, to His torture and crucifixion – their idea of a Savior was tested.
 - ii. Not only that, but the appearing of Jesus alive again was a huge surprise... let alone the 40 days of ongoing connection with the resurrected Lord.
 - iii. Maybe they didn't think Jesus would stay with them forever in His glorified, resurrected body – but certainly whatever their plans were, God had other plans in mind.

- d. The ascension of Jesus into heaven was a turning point... His earthly presence was interrupted... so that He could work in even more ways for the salvation of all people.
 - i. The ascension is a step Jesus took in glory to be a living and active part in the plan of salvation... by God the Father placing Him at His right hand as the almighty, omnipotent, all-powerful one, whose authority is above all things. (Matt. 28:18; Ephesians 1:19-23)
 - ii. You see, God's plan was never for Jesus to be an earthly king, or ruler that people had to worship in a central location... it was to rule from heaven above, while filling us all His followers with His presence.

V. **God's plan may not always be our plan, but we are His focus.**

- a. Scripture tells us that God's mighty hand or rule will be for the benefit of His chosen people... as the right hand of God will always be there to bless and deliver us. (Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 18:35, 98:1, 60:5)
 - i. In other words, God is active in sustaining, caring, and loving His people – and Jesus is now in that place of power in heaven.
 - ii. Yes, Jesus needed to be a real human being... and so He carried out His earthly work with humility and obedience to the Father's plan – which meant that He went to the cross and died as a sacrifice for our sins.
 - iii. Yet, after Jesus rose from the dead, the Father's plan was to coronate Jesus as the King of kings and place Him at His right hand so the work on earth could continue through the Holy Spirit.
- b. Jesus is now in heaven, the King of Glory, and He never stops working to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), to support and strengthen those who are found, and to rule over all things with God's plan in mind.
- c. As Jesus' earthly ministry ended with the ascension, some might consider it an interruption in God's presence with us... but in fact, it was the beginning of Jesus work through His followers.
 - i. As Jesus tells them before He ascends, "You will be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8) – as Jesus and the Gospel message would be carried out even while He is in heaven.
- d. The goal and message are clear – God loves us so much that He wants all to know the salvation found in Jesus Christ.
 - i. God's plan is about us... His love for us and His desire to bring us to be with Him face-to-face in glory.
 - ii. We may not see the full picture today, but never doubt that Jesus is working overtime as the ascended King of kings to deliver you... and all people into the blessed rest of eternal life... in the very presence of God. Amen.

¹ Source: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Martyred Christian*. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 30, no. 1.